

## Ready to Serve

LWML Sunday – 10/13/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 1:26-38 Pastor Keith Besel

v.38, [Mary says to Gabriel in response to God's call to service,] **“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”**

### **Introduction**

- ✘ The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 was passed by the U.S. Congress on September 16, 1940. It required all men between the ages of 21 and 64 to register with the Selective Service. Then on December 7, 1941, the Japanese military launched a surprise attack on the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.
  - ➔ Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Congress amended the act to require all able-bodied men ages 18 to 64 to register with their local draft board for military service throughout the duration of World War II. In reality though, only men 18 to 45 years old were ever drafted.
  - ➔ Within 30 days of the Pearl Harbor attack, 134,000 Americans enlisted in the military. More than 16 million served in the military in World War II. Of that 16.1 million only 6.1 million service members were volunteers. That means that roughly 2/3 of the men that served in World War II were drafted into service.
- ✘ In an attempt to aid in the recruiting process there was a famous poster brought back from its use in World War I that had Uncle Sam pointing straight at the person viewing the poster with a caption that read “I Want You for U.S. Army.”

### **I. God Calls Mary into Service**

- ✘ Today, in our famous Gospel Reading, which is generally read during the season of Advent, God points His finger at the Virgin Mary and says, “I want you!” This calling is so much greater than that of Uncle Sam or any other call from the people or entities of this world.
  - ➔ This is God the Almighty; the Creator of the heavens and the earth calling on Mary in a very direct way. And if anyone thinks this was an easy call for her to ponder, you're not really considering all that Mary would have to sacrifice and endure with this call. Yet the Biblical text presents Mary's response of faith and trust as if she didn't even hesitate for a moment before boldly declaring that she was ready to serve her Lord; to be His faithful servant.
  - ➔ As I said, God was calling her to a very big task; to be the earthly mother of the ultimate Servant – God's Son. In fact any and all human service can only exist because of His perfect standard of humility and self-sacrifice for others. As Gabriel said, this Son to come from Mary's virgin womb would be “called the Son of the Most High” (v. 32). As Paul tells us in our Epistle Reading, Jesus would “obediently” serve His Father's; actually the entire Triune God's plan to save all of mankind “to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8).
- ✘ Gabriel says His given name from God would be “Jesus” (v.31) which means “Yahweh saves”. And when Mary heard this amazing news, she was quick to offer up her life entirely and openly to serve God and His purpose.

### **II. Ready to serve**

- ✘ What about you and me? Have we been called directly from God too? Though we commonly forget about or take it for granted, the answer is yes. It wasn't an angel that God sent to us. No, He chose to be more direct with us than that. He came Himself to you and me in the Holy Spirit, through His Water-and-Word calling in our baptism – adopting us into His unique and chosen

community of believers – as we confessed earlier in the Creed, the “holy Christian Church, the ‘common union’ of saints.”

→ And it’s here in His Church that God promises to equip us, strengthen us and build us up – as long as we don’t misuse or refuse to use His Word and Sacraments or ignore the mutual encouragement of His family of believers here, so that we too, like Mary have been made ready to serve our Lord in eagerness and joy.

✘ In fact, in both the Nicene and the Apostles’ Creeds, we affirm God’s implementing of Mary into His service when we confess that Jesus was “incarnate” or “conceived by the Holy Spirit” in and through His servant, the “virgin Mary”. And don’t forget that when Gabriel came to Mary here in today’s text she was somewhere around 15-years-old, living in Nazareth, and engaged to Joseph.

→ I think we can all agree that Gabriel’s message changes her life. He comes both to comfort Mary and share her job description. Verses 30-31: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus.”

→ So, if Gabriel just appeared to you or me right here; right now as he did to Mary, our instinctive response would be fear, wouldn’t it? But, not only does Gabriel literally say to Mary, “Stop fearing” but he adds, “you have found favor” with God.

✘ She didn’t deserve God’s favor; His grace; His undeserved kindness. She was a sinner, just like you and me. She couldn’t earn God’s favor any more than we can. But God chose her – purely by grace – to be the mother of Jesus.

→ This was a massively big deal! God was about to fulfill His promise to send the Messiah. He was preparing to send His Son on the mission of all missions; to save the world; to save all of mankind from our sin.

→ But let’s be clear, God did not merely recruit His Son, as we might think of someone being chosen for a special task. He was sending His Son – a very part of Himself – to pay the debt of sin for you and me and all people. As Luther taught us to say it in his meaning to the Second Article of the Creed: “who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.”

✘ After all those years of waiting – some 4000 years – God was going to make it happen. This young “nobody” of a person, Mary, was about to be the mother of the promised Messiah.

→ So it makes sense that Mary was perplexed. We can only imagine what thoughts may have been racing through her mind. So, she asked Gabriel a question, not a question like Zechariah, the father of John the Baptizer did when he asked the angel for a sign. No, Mary simply asked for an explanation. Her confusion is reasonable. She was still a virgin. “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” she asked in verse 34.

→ God’s answer? Your child will not have a human father. Verse 35, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” You see, this child could not be conceived and born in sin like the rest of us. He was going to be called the “Son of God.”

✘ Mary’s son would be God’s Son. Perfect! Without sin – before and after conception and into eternity. A human man unlike any other, making it possible for Jesus to say in John 3:16, “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

→ Back to Mary’s question, “How can this be?” Both the angel’s answer and the summary of his message: “Nothing will be impossible with God” (v. 37). That which is impossible in any and

every one of our human minds, God was now doing! There would be one – and only one, human birth without a human father – using a virgin peasant girl as the mother. God takes the ordinary and creates the extra-ordinary; truly that which is out-of-this-world extraordinary.

✘ And Mary's response? "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (v.38). Mary was ready to go. No hesitation, because Mary was a woman of faith; faith that allowed her to believe and accept the angel's message without question; faith that placed her in the ready-position to serve her Lord.

✘ And what's the basis that makes Mary ready to serve? It is God's holy and perfect Word. She said, "Let it be to me according to your word" (v.38). She believed that this message through Gabriel was in fact, God telling her that she would be the mother of the Son of God.

➔ Mary heard these seemingly impossible words, but her focus was not on the "impossible" part, but on the fact that these were God's Words. That made the "impossible" things irrelevant, because her faith, knew from all that she had seen and heard in her 15 or so years of learning about God's power and His way of operating from the recorded Scripture that "nothing will be impossible with God" (v.37).

➔ This fact alone strengthened and emboldened Mary to be ready to serve. She didn't worry about how she'd explain this to Joseph, her fiancé. It wasn't going to be easy, but she trusted in God; she knew that God would work it all out.

✘ After all Jesus, her son - God's Son was coming to serve; to fulfill a much bigger task than just being miraculously born. His task; His job description, as He shared with His disciples in Mark 10:45 was this: "...the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

➔ Jesus' entire life was one of serving. He taught and He healed people, and then He went to the cross. And on the third day He rose from the grave. Why? To bring us salvation. As Paul summed it up in Philippians 2:6-8, ... "Christ Jesus ... emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

✘ In true servant-like form, Jesus made the impossible possible – not for Himself, but for us! Purely by God's grace and favor Jesus accomplished the impossible; opening up eternal life to us sinners; to all who believe in Him.

➔ Yes, His was a rescue mission here to earth; a mission that meant He would suffer agony that none of us could ever imagine; that He would die to pay for all the sins over all the world; that He would do the impossible – rise from death to conquer death. Yes, that first Easter morning – Jesus accomplished His mission.

### III. Saved to Serve

✘ Now, what's that mean for us? Mary was ready to serve! Jesus served. What about you? What about me? If we're looking for some inspiration, we can look at Mary and her response. God has already made you and me entirely ready to serve Him, just as He did Mary.

➔ We've already received and experienced God's grace through the efforts of His Son. He's already given us His written Word; the same Word that is proclaimed here every week in worship; that we study and apply in Bible Class and Sunday School. Through these gifts of grace He has redeemed us from sin, death and the devil.

➔ Because of that saving work, you and I now have the opportunity to be servants just as Mary did. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:15, "He (Jesus) died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised."

- So, are you ready to serve? Jesus' death for you says, "Yes you are!" We stand ready to serve and we do so with joy.
- ✘ Today, we remember our *Lutheran Women in Mission*, also known as the LWML. Their motto is all about willing service; about the attitude of joyfully serving. It's up there on the banner: Psalm 100:2, "Serve the LORD with gladness!"
- Since 1942, *Lutheran Women in Mission* has focused on affirming each woman's oneness with Christ; encouraging and equipping women to live out their Christian lives in active ministries of service to God around the entire world.
- Between the years of 2023 to 2025, their goal is to raise \$2,350,000 through their Mite Boxes; through their offerings to fund mission projects both in the U.S. and around the world.
- ✘ When God called Mary, she was ready to serve, saying, "I am the servant of the Lord" (v. 38). Then her Son; God's Son said of Himself, "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28).
- So today, as His baptized children; because of Him you and I are made and redeemed ready to serve. Martin Luther teaches us to understand it this way: Why did Jesus give His life and redeem us? "...that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness".
- For "...He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This (my dear friends,) is most certainly true" (meaning to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Creed). Amen.